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ABSTRACT

This study reflects a synthesis of a number of interrelated activities that have been performed by the Army Family Research Plan family adaptation research group over 3 years. These activities have included literature reviews, model development, primary and secondary analysis of available datasets and expert/user consultations, as well as field visits to conduct interviews with soldiers, family members, and Army leaders and service providers. Indicators of family adaptation were found to vary by individual, family, work, and community characteristics such as informal support networks, military support services, and military leadership support. Policymakers and Army leaders can use the findings to guide their decisions concerning the family programs that are most likely to foster family adaptation. Future research on military family adaptation needs to expand current efforts in several new directions. These include more attention to multi-method approaches to examining family adaptation, more use of qualitative methodologies, more short-term longitudinal research and more intervention research focusing on the effects of selected programs and services. Without careful investigations of outcomes from military program interventions, it is difficult to make appropriate judgments of program effectiveness or to understand the potential contributions that selected support services can have for military family adaptation. (ABL)

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U.S. Army Research Institute
for the Behavioral and Social Sciences

Research Report 1559

Family Adaptation in the Military

Dennis K. Orthner and Gary L. Bowen
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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This research supports The Army Family Action Plans (1984-1989) by providing new information on family adaptation to military leaders and policymakers and generating hypotheses to be evaluated in the Army Family Research Program (AFRP).

Findings were summarized for the different AFRP investigations, which have included research and literature reviews, model development, primary and secondary analysis of available data sets, consultations, and field interviews.

Indicators of family adaptation are found to vary by individual, family, work, and community characteristics such as informal support networks, military support services, and military leadership support.

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Policymakers and Army leaders can use the findings in this report to guide their decisions concerning the family programs that are most likely to foster family adaptation. This report will also be of value in deriving hypotheses for the Army Family Research Program.

Research Report 1559

Family Adaptation in the Military

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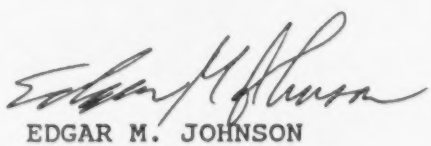
FOREWORD

The Army Family Research Program (AFRP) is a 5-year integrated research program started in November 1986 in response to research mandated by the CSA White Paper 1983: The Army Family and subsequently by The Army Family Action Plans (1984-1989). The objective of the research is to support the Army Family Action Plans through research products that will (1) determine the demographic characteristics of Army families, (2) identify positive motivators and negative detractors to soldiers remaining in the Army, (3) develop pilot programs to improve family adaptation to Army life, and (4) increase operational readiness.

The research is being conducted by the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) with assistance from Research Triangle Institute, Caliber Associates, HumRRO, and the University of North Carolina. It is funded by Army research and development funds that were set aside under Management Decision Package (1U6S).

This report presents a summary of the research findings from the Army Family Research Program on family adaptation. These findings were presented to Army and DoD program managers and policymakers at the DoD Family Research Review Conference at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, in February 1990. Their comments and requests for additional copies of the presentation indicate that they found the information useful for the programs of their agencies.



EDGAR M. JOHNSON
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Requirement:

To support The Family Action Plans (1984-1989) by summarizing the research findings from the Army Family Research Program (AFRP) on family adaptation for military leaders and policymakers and for generating hypotheses to be evaluated in the Army Family Research Program (AFRP).

Procedure:

Findings were summarized for the different AFRP investigations that have included research and literature reviews, model development, primary and secondary analysis of available data sets, consultations, and field interviews.

Findings:

Indicators of family adaptation are found to vary by individual, family, work, and community characteristics such as informal support networks, military support services, and military leadership support.

Utilization of Findings:

Policymakers and Army leaders can use the findings in this report to guide their decisions concerning the family programs that are most likely to foster family adaptation. This report will also be of value in deriving hypotheses for the Army Family Research Program.

FAMILY ADAPTATION IN THE MILITARY

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FAMILY ADAPTATION IN THE MILITARY

Introduction

Interest in the adaptation of families to environmental demands has grown in recent years. Throughout American society, it has become increasingly apparent that families change in response to the needs of their members as well as to the organizations and systems with which they interact. Perhaps the most significant family adaptations are to the demands placed on them by work organizations. In particular, work organizations that dominate the environment for families, such as the military, exert unusual pressures on families to alter their expectations and patterns of behavior in response to work requirements (Bowen & Orthner, 1989).

Family adaptation within the military is especially important, given the demands of the mission and the readiness requirements; the service member must be prepared for duty at all times. In many work environments, family and organization demands can be more easily reconciled because of the relatively distinct spheres of influence over which each system has control. The military services, however, are unusually demanding or "greedy" (Segal, 1986) because of their readiness requirements. This places more pressure on families to respond in ways that facilitate coping by the service member. If the family does not adapt, asserting its independence from organizational demands, then the service member is unlikely to perform responsively to his or her job requirements, may experience low job morale, and will probably separate from the service at the next opportunity (Etheridge, 1989).

Since the morale, productivity, and retention of service members are key aspects of mission effectiveness, the support and adaptation of families has become quite important to the armed services. The Army Family Research Program (AFRP) has given significant attention to this concept in order to determine the factors that predict family adaptation as well as the consequences of adaptation to individual and unit performance and retention. The AFRP is a five-year integrated research program of the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) and is sponsored by the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center. In part, this research program is an outgrowth of the military family research that has been conducted in all the armed services during the past decade as well as a response to the research mandates of the Chief of Staff of the Army (1983).

As a concept, family adaptation is relatively new to social science (Bowen, 1990a). It has emerged in large part out of the increased attention being given to the complex interplay between service members and the broad and dynamic social context in which they live and work. Concerns over family adaptation have paralleled changing demographics and social trends in the military community that show an increase in married and single parent households, a higher proportion of female service members, growth in the labor force participation rates of civilian spouses of service members, a convergence toward less traditional gender-role preferences among men and women in marriage, and an emerging preference by an increasing number of men for an expanded role in marriage and parenthood (Bowen & Orthner, 1989; Orthner, Bowen, & Beare, in preparation).

Research to date suggests that the military organization and the family system of the service member become wedded through a lifestyle that absorbs the family through a unique combination of demands and supports. The balance between these demands and supports can make the organization and the family either allies or adversaries in their competition for the allegiance, loyalty, and commitment of the service member (Orthner & Pittman, 1986). Thus, the military services create a unique interacting system of individuals, families, communities and work units that must be mutually reinforcing and adaptive in order for any part of the system to be effective in carrying out its functions (Martin & Orthner, 1989).

Although various indicators of family adaptation (e.g., marital and family life satisfaction, satisfaction with the military lifestyle) have been associated with mission-oriented variables, past definitions and measurements of family adaptation have been ambiguous. Hampered by this ambiguity, organizational researchers have struggled to identify and model the personal and environmental factors associated with its variation. These limitations have constrained the comparability and generalizability of empirical research as well as limited the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions designed to enhance the adaptation of families to the rigors of military life.

The AFRP specifically addresses the need for greater conceptual clarity of the "family adaptation" concept, as well as expanded understanding of factors that are associated with its variation. As a brief overview of work to date, this report discusses the concept of family adaptation, identifies indicators for its measurement, and discusses how these indicators have been found to vary by individual, family, work, and community characteristics. It concludes by highlighting implications of this research for policy and practice and by suggesting directions for continued research.

This summary reflects a synthesis of a number of interrelated activities that have been performed by the AFRP family adaptation research group over the last three years. These activities have included literature reviews (Bowen, 1987a, 1987b; DeJong, 1987a, 1987b; Neenan, 1988; Orthner, Duvall, & Stawarski, 1988; Orthner, Early-Adams, & Pollack, 1988; Stawarski, 1987; Styles, 1987a, 1987b), model development (Bowen, 1990a; Orthner & Scanzoni, 1988), primary and secondary analysis of available datasets (Bowen, 1989, 1990b; Bowen & Neenan, 1990) and expert/user consultations, as well as field visits to conduct individual and focus-group interviews with soldiers, family members, and Army leaders and service providers (Styles, Janofsky, Blankinship, & Bishop, 1990). Related research is also reviewed in order to augment the findings from the AFRP effort.

The Concept of Family Adaptation

Organizational researchers have struggled to define family adaptation. Investigated largely as an outcome of the family's efforts to cope with crisis (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1987), it has been most often defined from an interactive perspective as an outcome or level of "fit" between families and systems in their environment (McCubbin & Patterson,

1983). At least two types of "fit" are discussed in the literature (Caplan, 1983). The first relates to the level of fit between the demands from the environment on the family system and its members and the abilities of family members, either individually or collectively, to met these demands: the "Demands-Abilities Fit." A second form of fit involves the congruency between the individual and collective needs of family members and the resources and opportunities available to the family system and its members to met these needs: the "Need-Resources Fit." From this latter perspective, family adaptation is defined as the level of congruency between the "demands/needs" of the family system and its members and the "resources/abilities" available to the family system and its members.

This outcome is perhaps best captured by Constantine's (1986, p. 26) definition of the "enabled" family system:

> An enabled family system is one that: (1) on the average, is able to meet most of its collective or jointly defined needs and goals; (2) on the average, enables most of its members to meet most of their individual needs and individually defined goals; and (3) does not consistently and systematically disable any particular member(s) from meeting individual needs and goals.

From a military perspective, an "enabled" or an "adaptive" family system supports the service member in achieving his or her military ambitions and in fulfilling his or her requirements (individual goals and needs); at the same, the service member has a reciprocal responsibility to support the family and its members in meeting their defined needs and goals within the context of the military lifestyle. Importantly, these collective and individual needs and goals are met in full "partnership," not at the expense of any one family member or members.

It is hypothesized that the ability of the family system to meet its individual and collective needs and goals and to achieve a "goodness of fit" within the military environment leads to a positive behavioral and emotional response to this environment. Leaders in the military services have described this response by a number of terms, including "shared purpose," "mutuality," "partnership," and "military-family fit" (Styles et al., 1990). A key aspect of this approach to family adaptation is its appreciation of the rich diversity in family patterns, needs, and values in the military services today.

For purposes of the present research review, family adaptation is operationalized from an "organizational outcome" perspective based upon the results of interviews with military leaders, service providers, and family members themselves who have participated in military research efforts. Their responses suggest that the appropriate focus is on "family adaptation to military life," not on "family adaptation to life in general" (Styles et al., 1990).

Research Findings

The research reviewed is examined in terms of the indicators of family adaptation identified above. Two lines of research are interpreted in this report: those which investigate the experience of family adaptation and those that examine predictors of family adaptation.

The Experience of Family Adaptation

While there have been a large number of investigations that have examined family relationships in the military, only a small proportion of these have addressed the issue of family adaptation. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have been used, leading to an emerging picture of family adaptation patterns in the armed services.

Based on the research conducted thus far, the majority of military families are adapting to demands placed upon them. In an analysis of a world-wide survey of Army families, it was found that the perceived adaptability of the family depended upon the indicator of adaptation that was used (Griffith, Stewart, & Cato, 1988). For example, about one out of six (14%) spouses indicated that the demands the Army makes of family members is a serious problem, over half say it is a slight or moderate problem (56%), and the remainder (30%) indicated it is not a problem for them.

The problems associated with the demands on families are greatest for young families of enlisted personnel. Almost one in five (19%) spouses of specialists fourth class and corporals indicated that adapting to Army demands is a serious problem for them and only one in four (25%) indicated that it is not a problem at all. While spouses of company grade officers were somewhat more likely to admit to problems adapting to Army demands, only about one in ten officers' spouses indicated this was a serious adaptation problem. The overall patterns of families "getting along" when the soldier is away are quite similar, although fewer spouses of officers (6%) indicated that they had problems with separations than spouses of junior enlisted personnel (23%).

Families reported having fewer problems adapting to day to day stresses. When spouses were asked about problems coping with everyday stress, only 8% of the enlisted spouses and 3% of the officers' spouses considered this to be a serious problem. In contrast, one out of five spouses (22%) noted that they had serious problems in achieving personal goals within a military environment. This is true for both spouses of enlisted and officers. Similarly, a much higher percentage of spouses anticipated having serious problems if the military member became involved in combat. More than one-fourth (21%) of Army spouses indicated that a combat situation would cause serious problems for them and their families; another half (51%) predicted a slight or minor problem; and only one-fifth (20%) said it was not likely to be a problem.

From these data, it appears that Army families are experiencing a higher level of "fit" in the area of "demands-abilities" than in the area of "needs-resources". That is, more families are able to respond effectively to the role demands placed on them by the military than are able to change their personal

and family needs in response to expectations that the Army has for families. Thus, it is easier for families to adapt by changing their behaviors than by changing their values (Bowen, 1989). Doing what is necessary to cope, therefore, is easier than changing a system of beliefs which may make the behaviors more or less satisfactory. Thus, this line of research indicates that many families may be adapting functionally to military demands but not necessarily agreeing that adaptation is in their personal or family best interests.

Characteristics Associated with Family Adaptation

There are a number of factors that tend to be associated with the adaptation of families to military life. Perhaps the most important factor is the amount of experience the family has with military life, as measured by years of service, pay grade, age and years of marriage (Griffith et al., 1988). In general, the older and more experienced the individual or family, the more positive the adaptation is likely to be. In part, this is because of experience with the system and the ability to garner the resources that are necessary to effectively adapt to demands. In addition, families that are not able to adapt are unlikely to continue their obligation to the military, leaving in the service the most adapted families, particularly those that are beyond the first tour of duty.

Family Resources and Family Adaptation

Resources also play a part in the higher levels of adaptation reported by officer families compared to enlisted families. On almost all measures, officer families reported higher levels of family adaptation (Griffith et al., 1988). An important consistent finding is that the adaptation of officer families did not vary significantly by family life cycle or grade of the member while the adaptation of enlisted families increases substantially with years of service. As children get older and the service member is in longer, attrition may play some part in this difference. But it is very likely that the higher levels of education, financial resources, and social support among officer families facilitates the adaptation of these families in comparison to their enlisted counterparts.

Family adaptation is influenced by relocation as well (Janofsky, 1989). Moving disrupts normal resources and families that have moved recently, especially within the last year, experience lower than normal levels of family adaptation (Ammons, Nelson, & Wodarski, 1982). Moving also places significant stress on children and their lower levels of psychological well-being after a move tends to place stress on their parents and the family system as well (Orthner, Giddings, & Quinn, 1987).

While adaptation is a family phenomenon, the level of fit between the individual/family and the work organization can vary within the family; the experiences of men and women can be very different. In one investigation comparing male with female service members, it was found that married women were experiencing significantly less fit between organization and family demands than married men (Pittman & Orthner, 1989). When establishing a sense of fit between the organization and the family, active duty women depend more

on instrumental criteria, such as pay and benefits, than men. Active duty men were much more likely to rely on their social support and family relationships when establishing a sense of fit, perhaps because their social and family networks can more easily be established in the military environment.

Interestingly, the factors associated with family adaptation in quantitative research are supported by qualitative research. When asked to identify families at-risk for poor adaptation, Army leaders and service providers interviewed by AFRP researchers reported similar sets of patterns (Styles et al., 1990). The families they reported experiencing the most difficulty adjusting to Army life included:

- Young, junior enlisted soldiers with families.
- Families with financial and marital problems.
- Families that lack the experience and maturity to cope with their situation.
- Newly married couples who are far away from family and other support systems.
- Families that have just arrived on post.

Informal Support and Family Adaptation

Social support by friends, neighbors and work associates appears to be one of the most important factors predicting family adaptation to work organization demands. In nearly every investigation, inadequate social support has been shown to be associated with poor psychological and family well-being as well as with indicators of poor family adaptation (Orthner, Duvall, & Stawarski, 1988; Styles, 1987b). In both civilian and military research, social support appears to play a major role in encouraging coping and adaptive behavior (McCubbin, Patterson, & Lester, 1977).

Social isolation is one of the factors that is most likely to predict poor family adaptation. Families with few nearby friends or relatives tend to report lower levels of satisfaction and more indicators of family distress. Informal support networks seem to be particularly important for the adaptation of younger families, many of whom have inadequate financial and other personal resources (Griffith et al., 1988) and for women, both service members and spouses (Bowen, 1990a; Pittman & Orthner, 1989).

The potential contribution of a "psychological sense of community" has been demonstrated in several investigations by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) (Martin & Orthner, 1989). For example, in an investigation of military spouses living in an overseas military community, it was found that wives who were low on a measure of psychological sense of community were five times more likely to "return early" to the United States when compared with wives who were high on this measure (Schneider & Gilley, 1984). Likewise, families who were experiencing stress associated with overseas living, extensive training separations, and/or the possibility of actual

combat tended to report lower levels of stress-related difficulties when they are embedded in a strong social support network (Marlowe & Martin, 1988). One of the purported advantages of the Army's Unit Manning System is the creation of stable small groups with higher levels of social support. Preliminary evidence suggests that these units do provide more informal support continuity and improved family adaptation (Marlowe, 1986).

The AFRP interviews with unit leaders, service providers, and family members confirm the importance of social support. When asked for strategies that will assist families in adapting to Army life, respondents were more likely to mention participation in community activities and informal networks than any other factors (Styles et al., 1990). Research on families who were relocating supports these observations (Janofsky, 1989). Families who participated earlier in informal networks were more likely to adapt to their new environment more easily and quickly. They were also more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with the military service.

Support Programs and Family Adaptation

The potential contribution to family adaptation of military-sponsored, community and family support programs underlies much of the growth in support services during the 1980s (Bell & Iadeluca, 1987). In fact, the White Paper 1983: The Army Family (Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, 1983) explicitly hypothesizes that improvements in family support by the armed forces will result in increased support for the member's career and higher levels of family adaptation.

Data confirm that support programs can positively impact on families. In an analysis of the 1985 DoD Survey, it was found that satisfaction with selected support programs was significantly related to satisfaction with the military as a way of life among civilian spouses of Army members (Bowen & Neenan, 1990). These relationships held for officer and enlisted spouses, with and without children.

Efforts to examine the unique contribution of family support programs to family adaptation have also been successful. When new family support services are introduced into a military community, both active duty personnel and their spouses report improvements in their satisfaction with military life and their perceptions of "fit" between military and family life (Orthner & Pittman, 1986). In research comparing the relative contributions of organizational support and family support to military-family fit among married male and female service members, the effect of organizational support was independent from family support for male service members but not for female members (Pittman & Orthner, 1989). Thus, men do not integrate organizational support services into their overall system of support while women view organizational support as a less abstract, more concrete part of their military family support system. Married military men probably do not deal directly with military support agencies to the extent that married military women do.

Recent investigations indicate that military support programs contribute to family adaptation in both symbolic and direct ways (Bowen & Neenan, 1990). Research demonstrates that perceptions of improved military support services

for families yield higher levels of service satisfaction and perceptions of fit. This is the symbolic benefit. Nevertheless, direct relationships between the use of selected support programs and military family satisfaction or support have not always resulted in high levels of association. For example, some valuable programs are rehabilitative and participation often required. This makes them attractive to only a small percentage of families, especially since a stigma may be attached to their use (Orthner, Pittman, & Monroe, 1984). However, when individual programs are directed toward "normal" family adaptation difficulties, such as assisting in relocation, then the impacts are more likely to be positive (Bowen, 1990a). In fact, the lack of relocation support services results in poor family adaptation and diminished family support for the member.

The overall contribution of community support services to family adaptation is still somewhat unclear. AFRP research indicates that most families are still quite uninformed about the services available to them and may be unwilling to access some programs for fear of the consequences to the service member (Griffith et al., 1988; Orthner, Early-Adams, & Pollack, 1988). Family adaptation is also not helped when programs are targeted largely toward individuals and families in stress and not toward the larger community that needs assistance for normal transitions in their lives (Orthner & Bowen, 1982). In general, research of the family adaptation outcomes of most support programs has either not been conducted in military settings or the results are as yet preliminary.

Leadership Support and Family Adaptation

The role of military leaders in supporting family adaptation has been examined in a number of investigations. When family members were interviewed in AFRP focus groups, participants were more likely to mention unit or installation leaders as important in determining the supportiveness of the military environment than any other factor (Blankinship, 1990; Styles et al., 1990). Supportive commanders were viewed as crucial to the development of family support groups and the level of communication between families in the unit. The use and effectiveness of support services was considered dependent on the support of the commanders and the NCOs in the unit and on the post.

This crucial role of leaders as catalysts for community support and family adaptation has also been reported in WRAIR research. These investigations have demonstrated the especially important role of unit level leaders to the development of supportive relationships among unit families (Bartone, 1987). In units where leaders have created climates of trust and caring, the bonds between soldiers are stronger as are the bonds between families (Kirkland, 1988). When soldiers who had left these units were later interviewed, they expressed a desire to return, in large part because of the leader induced sense of soldier and family belonging (Furukawa, Ingraham, Kirkland, Marlowe, Martin, & Schneider, 1987).

Research on larger samples of military families also finds that leader support is important to family adaptation. Among Army spouses surveyed in 1987, perceptions of leadership support were highly associated with satisfaction with military life (Griffith et al., 1988). For instance, among

spouses of enlisted personnel, those who were satisfied with the support and concern of unit NCOs were almost twice as likely (72%) to be satisfied with the Army as a way of life than those who were dissatisfied (38%) with NCO support and concern. This relationship is even stronger when Army level leadership was examined. Among spouses who are satisfied with Army leader support for families, 89 percent are satisfied with the Army way of life; only 30 percent are dissatisfied with Army support for families.

Leadership support of families is very strongly related with family adaptation. In an analysis of the 1985 DoD survey data, perceptions of the service's attitude toward military families was strongly associated with family satisfaction even after controlling for other factors in the analysis including pay, allowances, job security, medical care, and housing (Bowen & Neenan, 1990). Among officer spouses with children it had a higher correlation with satisfaction than any other of the quality of life indicators.

Benefits of Family Adaptation for the Military

While research on the benefits of family adaptation to military outcomes is still in its infancy, there are several investigations that suggest potentially important outcomes for personnel commitments and readiness. This research is largely cross-sectional, making it difficult to demonstrate causal relationships, but the consistency in the findings thus far is quite instructive.

First of all, there appears to be a consistent relationship between family adaptation related measures and commitments to a military career (Bowen, 1990a; Etheridge, 1989). Perceptions of fit between the family and the military lifestyle was found to be associated with higher levels of spouse support for a military career (Pittman & Orthner, 1989) as well as with member career intentions (Orthner & Pittman, 1986; Pittman & Orthner, 1989). According to research, family adaptation is related to satisfaction with the military which is in turn associated with spouse support and member career plans. The pattern of these influences has been demonstrated in several investigations that included replication samples.

In an AFRP analysis of the 1987 Army spouse survey, the relationship between spouse satisfaction with the Army and spouse support for a military career was also confirmed (Griffith et al., 1988). Among spouses who were satisfied with the Army way of life, most (80%) wanted the soldier to stay until retirement and few (4%) wanted him to leave. In contrast, only one-third (34%) of those who were dissatisfied with the Army wanted their spouse to stay in the service and half (49%) wanted him to leave at the end of the current obligation. This pattern of support was found at all grade levels for both officer and enlisted families.

The consequences of family adaptation for readiness are still being explored but preliminary evidence suggests that this hypothesis is likely to be supported (Campbell, Campbell, Ramsberger, Schultz, Stawarski, & Styles, 1987; Pliske, 1988). Army personnel and spouses interviewed during AFRP site visits indicated that family adaptation can influence mission accomplishment

and job performance (Styles et al, 1990). Based on the experiences reported to the investigators, it was suggested that families support readiness objectives by providing emotional support, compensating for job stresses, and motivating work performance. In addition, it was noted that families that were not adapting well put added pressure on the soldier and the unit which hampered individual and unit performance and readiness.

Implications for Military Policy

The evidence from the research that has been conducted thus far suggests that the military services need to seriously consider policy directions that better support military family adaptation. Interactions between the military services and their communities and families need to be updated and revised to reflect the changing demographics of the force, as well as the patterns of adaptation that families today make to work organizations.

In line with the conceptual framework for family adaptation briefly reviewed in this report, there are several directions that policies supporting family adaptation will need to take. These include strategies that reduce demands on the family, increase the ability of families to deal with demands, increase resources for families, and assist families in a better understanding their needs and in developing realistic expectations toward the military service in responding to these needs. Changes that reflect each of these areas are proposed below.

Family Support Services

Increase the priority of family adaptation oriented prevention programs. To the extent that resources are limited, much more emphasis in the next decade needs to be given to problem prevention, program information, and referral. The need for prevention services has never been more apparent. Many programs still give too much attention to individuals and families in crisis and too little attention to those persons who are at-risk but not yet in crisis. The potential needs of families at-risk are well known, but more program emphasis should be directed to preventing crises before they occur. Research indicates that many military families who are in need do not use support programs, especially those programs associated with a negative social stigma. The result is inadequate adaptation on the part of large numbers of service families, while a few families are given special assistance.

A comprehensive system of information and referral services is also essential to effective coordination and delivery of support services to service members and their families (Bowen & Neenan, 1990). Not only are the support needs of service members and their families often complex and multifaceted, but also, families are often unaware of available support programs and services, reluctant to use these resources and supports, and have difficulty navigating through the complex maze of organizations, programs and services on the installation and in the local civilian community. In addition, needed resources and supports are not always available to service members and their families nor, if available, necessarily responsive to their needs. As a consequence, families may need a "broker" and/or an "advocate" to help them coordinate the service delivery system, to deal with their

reluctance to seek help, and to work through organizational barriers and constraints in the service delivery system that prevent them from receiving needed support services.

Support programs that facilitate close contact and cooperation between the unit and its families are definitely needed. These will encourage the formation of informal support networks among families within the unit. In addition to enhancing family adaptation, unit-based services will increase perceptions of leader support for families and, subsequently, enhance Army-family fit and satisfaction with Army life. By experimenting with "alternative service delivery systems," including systems that are more closely linked to military units rather than large centralized support systems (Bowen and Orthner, 1989, p. 186), the military services can continue to meet the challenges posed by changes in society, and focus not only on building a comprehensive human service network for families, but ensure that it operates in an effective and efficient manner.

Assistance during Transitions

While all the armed services are giving attention to programs and services for active duty personnel and families during transitions, the evidence from the research on family adaptation suggests that many of these services are not targeted or used effectively. The experiences which tend to threaten family adaptation include relocations, separations, and threats to the service member because of combat or training accidents.

Provide accurate, timely information about the relocation process and the new location. Evidence from research over the last several years indicates that programs that provide relocation support are typically inadequate, despite their importance to family adaptation. Improvements in the sponsorship program are not enough, although they are needed. As important is adequate information ahead of time about the relocation, including accurate information about what can be expected in the new location.

Provide more unit-based support services during separations. Likewise, assistance during separations is a continuing need, especially as deployments increase in the future when a higher proportion of troops are stationed in CONUS. Separations may become somewhat more common and unit-based support systems will be increasingly needed to foster family adaptation.

Require programs that prepare the family for the possible death or injury of the service member. The risks involved in military service also need to be translated into services that assist families in preparing for the possibility of adapting to injury and death. Many families anticipate difficulty with this type of adaptation and it is important to prepare them ahead of time for the rights and responsibilities that may accompany these events. This is particularly true in peacetime when these events are less frequent and procedures for facilitating change are not as clearly in place. Families need to be aware of this assistance and how it is designed to help them.

Informal Networks

The critical role of informal support systems to family adaptation has been frequently noted in research. Still, strategies to develop informal support networks are not well established, nor are they often developed to the greatest extent possible.

Increase social cohesion by incorporating the families of unit members in unit activities. Efforts to support the cohesion of work units need to be expanded to incorporate the families of unit members. This promotes greater understanding between unit leaders and members of the family about adaptation problems that may be arising within the unit. A stronger informal network also helps to provide resources and assistance before rather than after problems reach the crisis stage.

Enhance informal support networks by extending tour lengths. The armed services do a great deal by default to break down informal support systems in military communities. By moving people a great deal, providing segregated housing, and by delivering services in a bureaucratic manner, informal support systems are diminished. This is reflected in relatively low levels of self reliance and few close friendships that are often characteristic of military families. Informal networks create a community context that is much more likely to engender friendships and mutual aid rather than the dependency patterns sometimes fostered by formal support systems.

An important strategy that supports the development of informal networks is the extension of tour lengths. Longer tours of duty enhance continuity and allow families to build relationships with neighbors, friends and voluntary organizations. This is not only an advantage for adults, but children are also better able to create healthy, long-term relationships that promote their personal, social and academic development. This kind of continuity can also promote greater cohesion in work units, as the Army's research on the Unit Manning System has been discovering. Thus, concepts such as home-porting or home-basing can be workable solutions to many of the needs for cohesion and continuity that promote adaptation in many contexts of military life.

Family Preparation

One of the continuing problems for family adaptation in the armed forces is the high number of young marriages, many of them with small children. The group of people who are at the most risk for family distress and who cause the most problems for commanders and service providers are these young families. Unfortunately, the armed services have policies in place that, in effect, stimulate premature marriages and parenting. Thus, while the age of marriage and parenthood has been rising significantly in the society-at-large, this trend is not present in the armed forces nearly as much.

Revise policies that promote early marriage and parenthood. Careful consideration should be given to reexamining those military practices that encourage young marriages. This will include a careful review of policies that make single life in the armed forces less desirable than married life, as well as policies that may encourage couples to marry. For example, it may be

that the higher pay currently provided in the junior grades tends to give soldiers a false sense of economic security that may not be in the best interests of developing stable and adaptable marriage and parenthood. When this is coupled with housing requirements that limit freedom for single soldiers, early marriages may result and family adaptation may suffer.

Require basic training courses in marriage and relationship management. Emphasize the military context. Perhaps more important than examining policies, young enlisted personnel need much more information about what it takes to have a successful family life in the armed services. At the present time, there is little to no information available to single persons about how to develop a successful relationship and manage marital and family responsibilities within the military. It is suggested that this information should be included in basic training as well as unit training modules, so that marital and family plans are seriously considered by single persons and unit leaders alike. The issue of inadequate family adaptation among young enlisted personnel can no longer be ignored. The armed forces need to give serious attention to this matter.

Family Time

One of the most important indicators of success in family relationships is the amount of time that is devoted to the family. Work responsibilities in the armed forces are demanding but time and attention to family matters must also be given some priority if successful family adaptation is to occur. In addition to military service demands, an increasing number of families are also experiencing conflicting requirements from two working adults.

Provide greater opportunities for family time. While it may not be feasible to reduce family demands directly, the military organization/family "fit" equation can still be balanced in other ways. The services need to consider the nature of demands that they place on personnel in their families. For example, work requirements that extend beyond the normal duty day are sometimes unnecessary and have questionable ties to improved mission effectiveness. This type of "make work" can discourage personnel and reduce opportunities for personal and family time.

Give family time priority during transitions, such as relocations and deployments. Family adaptation is improved when families are able to negotiate these transitions together, particularly if they are anticipated events that involve everyone in the household. The purpose here is not to recommend specific policy changes, but to encourage military leaders and manpower representatives to critically examine the nature of military organization culture and policy and its impact on families. In agreement with Kohen, (1984, pp. 401) the military services have implicitly attempted to "adapt the family to the demands of the military career structure" rather than adapt the career structure to the realities of family life. A perfect fit between military work and family demands is probably not possible, but greater mutual accommodation will be necessary if family adaptation is to occur.

Family Values and Needs

Implement programs that teach families skills and resource development techniques to satisfy their needs. Another strategy for increasing family fit is to reduce the actual or perceived needs of service members and their families. The underlying strategy is to help service members and their families better understand the nature of their needs, their values and expectations toward them, and then promote their ability to satisfy them. Although chaplains in the military services have been conducting value clarification seminars for years, it remains important for service members and their families to have opportunities to explore the nature of their needs as well as their values and expectations toward them.

Individuals may have a diffuse sense of frustration with their lives, but have difficulty pinpointing the precise nature of this frustration. Unfortunately, they may unfairly project responsibility for their frustration onto the military broadly or to some specific individual or organization within it. Ridenour (1984, p. 5) concludes that military families often "triangulate" the military system into their conflicts as if it were a real person. At the present time, individual and family-oriented educational and enrichment experiences that focus on need identification, value clarification, and the skill and resource development to meet needs have much more promise than has been realized.

Although the "sense of coherence" concept by Antonovsky and Sourani (1988) may at first appear too academic to be practical, its three dimensions of "comprehensibility," "manageability," and "meaningfulness" do have rich implications for military policy. For example, to increase the "comprehensibility" of service members and their families, it is critical to provide them with information that affects their lives (e.g., information about anticipated temporary duty, planned duration of deployments, unit activities, on-post resources for families, and so forth). Based on secondary analysis of the One Thousand Army families in Europe dataset, Bowen (1989) found that the higher the level of "predictability" (an information-related measure), the higher the level of family adaptation of enlisted members and their spouses to an overseas tour.

Increase family participation in community decision-making. Service members and their families may also find military life more "meaningful" if they are actively involved in decisions that affect their lives. Certainly, the development of policies and support mechanisms that are designed to assist families and to promote their adaptation need family-level input and involvement. However, despite research that suggests its importance to promoting family adaptation (Bowen, 1984; Martin & Orthner, 1989), on most installations families are not included as active players in the decisions that affect their lives and communities.

Implications for Future Research

Future research on military family adaptation needs to expand current efforts into several new directions. These include more attention to multi-method approaches to examining family adaptation, more use of qualitative

methodologies, more short-term longitudinal research and more intervention research focusing on the effects of selected programs and services.

Current research efforts within AFRP are designed to address many of the basic information needs of the family adaptation research area. Most importantly, AFRP has developed a multi-dimensional set of measures of family adaptation that should for the first time provide data on the normative distribution of adaptive indicators in the military, in this case the Army. From this, profiles of families at-risk for poor adaptation can be developed and appropriate intervention strategies then recommended. The AFRP research will also examine the relationship between family adaptation and retention, readiness and adjustments to relocation and separation experiences.

Expand Multi-Method Research

Family adaptation research at the present time is limited because of the over-reliance on cross-sectional surveys, very limited case histories, and focus group interviews. The investigations use different frames of reference and definitions of family adaptation. A much more comprehensive look at adaptation is needed that allows for diverse measures being introduced in a variety of ways, including outside ratings, self-administered questionnaires, and behavioral analysis. The purpose of this would be to define the range of family adaptation experiences and to identify indicators that can be used in research and intervention efforts.

Include More Qualitative Methodologies

From the AFRP and WRAIR research conducted thus far, it is apparent that qualitative methodologies also need to be used in further research. Not all of the issues surrounding family adaptation in the military have been given attention and qualitative research can be particularly helpful in bringing all of the necessary issues to the fore. Qualitative methods are not the best methods for hypothesis testing or determining the distributions of families at risk in the military. But for the current state of knowledge, more structured, qualitative research is still needed.

Short-Term Longitudinal Research Is Also Needed in This Area

Many of the issues related to family adaptation are tied to adjustments made to selected circumstances, such as a relocation, separation, or some other life event. Family adaptation by itself is often a mute issue without a context. Research is needed that examines the family processes and strategies used to adapt to potentially stressful situations. For example, it would be very helpful to know how families recently adapted to the rapid deployment of forces to Panama: Which families adapted best? What strategies did they use? What resources did they find most helpful? What factors predicted those that coped well and those who did not?

Increase Priorities for Intervention Research on the Effects of Programs

Finally, much more information is needed on the effectiveness of family support programs and services, especially for family adaptation assistance.

In general, research evidence has not been too kind to support programs, but to be fair, the research on most programs has not been that well done. There has been very little research comparing the relative outcomes of alternative program designs. Careful investigations of outcomes from military program interventions are almost nonexistent. Without this kind of intervention research, it is difficult to make appropriate judgments of program effectiveness or to understand the potential contributions that selected support services can have for military family adaptation.

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